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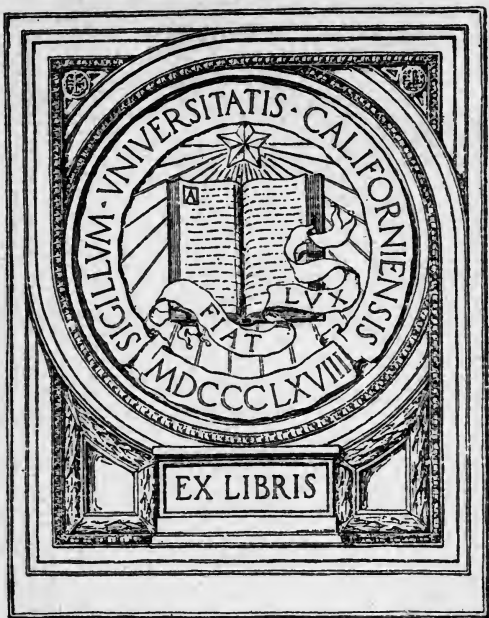


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BALLADS AND VERSES
OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

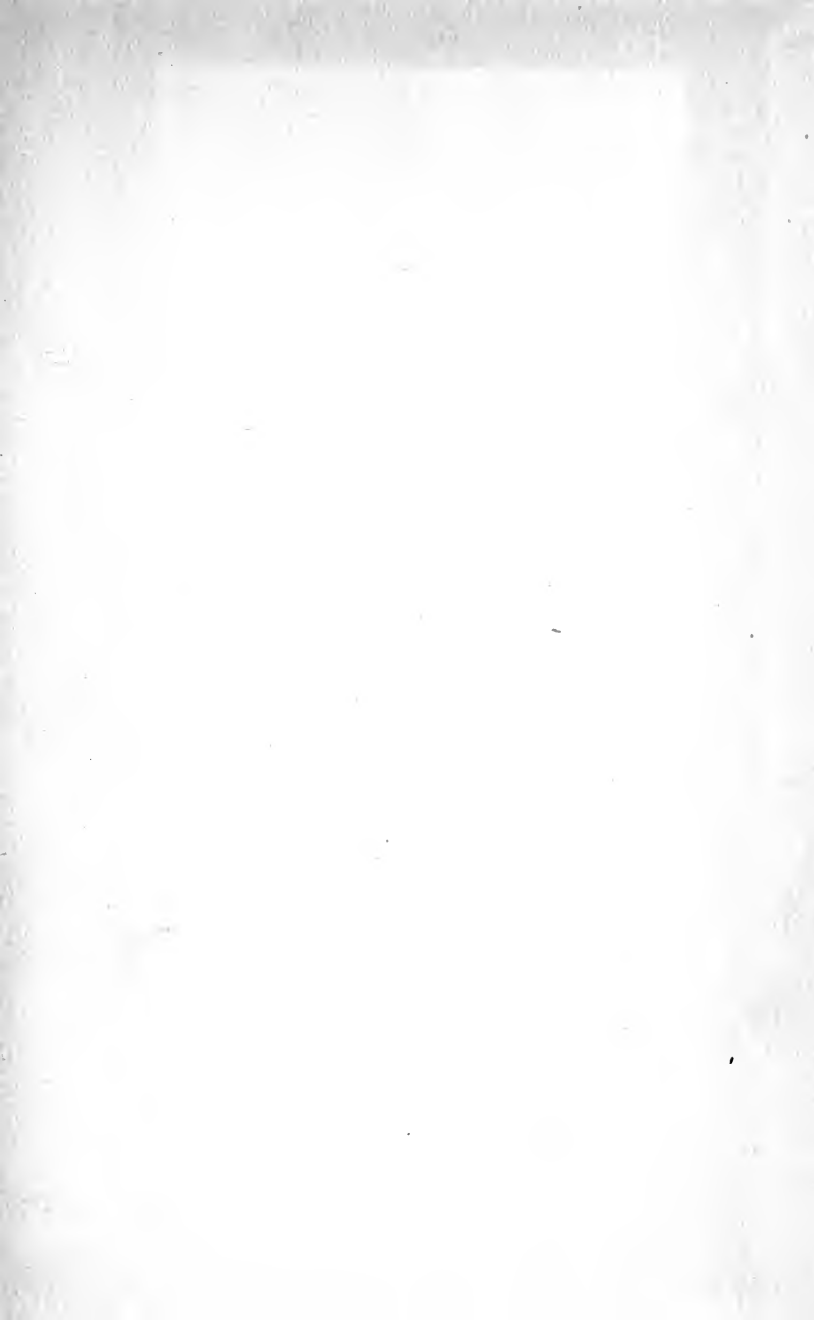
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E. NESBIT



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BALLADS AND VERSES
OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

BALLADS AND VERSES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

BY

E. NESBIT *Bland*
"

THE
NEW
EDITION

LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET, W.
M CM XI

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BALLADS AND VERSES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

At The Gate

THE monastery towers, as pure and fair
As virgin vows, reached up white hands to heaven ;
The walls, to guard the hidden heart of prayer,
Were strong as sin, and white as sin forgiven ;
And there came holy men, by world's woe driven ;
And all about the gold-green meadows lay
Flower-decked like children dear that keep May-holiday.

“ Here,” said the Abbot, “ let us spend our days,
Days sweetened by the lilies of pure prayer,
Hung with white garlands of the rose of praise ;
And, lest the World should enter with her snare—
Enter and laugh and take us unaware
With her red rose, her purple and her gold—
Choose we a stranger's hand the porter's keys to hold.”

They chose a beggar from the world outside
To keep their worldward door for them, and he,
Filled with a humble and adoring pride,
Built up a wall of proud humility
Between the monastery's sanctity
And the poor, foolish, humble folk who came
To ask for love and care, in the dear Saviour's name.

BALLADS AND VERSES

For when the poor crept to the guarded gate
To ask for succour, when the tired asked rest,
When weary souls, bereft and desolate,
Craved comfort, when the murmur of the oppressed
Surged round the grove where prayer had made her nest,
The porter bade such take their griefs away,
And at some other door their bane and burden lay.

“For this,” he said, “is the white house of prayer,
Where day and night the holy voices rise
Through the chill trouble of our earthly air,
And enter at the gate of Paradise.
Trample no more our flower-beds in such wise,
Nor crave the alms of our deep-laden bough;
The prayers of holy men are alms enough, I trow.”

So, seeing that no sick or sorrowing folk
Came ever to be healed or comforted,
The Abbot to his brothers gladly spoke:
“God has accepted our poor prayers,” he said;
“Over our land His answering smile is spread.
He has put forth His strong and loving hand,
And sorrow and sin and pain have ceased in all the land.

“So make we yet more rich our hymns of praise,
Warm we our prayers against our happy heart,
Since God hath taken the gift of all our days
To make a spell that bids all wrong depart—
Has turned our praise to balm for the world’s smart,
Fulfilled of prayer and praise be every hour,
For God transfigures praise, and transmutes prayer to power.”

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

So went the years. The flowers blossomed now
Untrampled by the dusty, weary feet ;
Unbroken hung the green and golden bough,
For none came now to ask for fruit or meat,
For ghostly food, or common bread to eat ;
And dreaming, praying, the monks were satisfied,
Till, God remembering him, the beggar-porter died.

When they had covered up the foolish head,
And on the foolish loving heart heaped clay,
“ Which of us, brothers, now,” the Abbot said,
“ Will face the world, to keep the world away ? ”
But all their hearts were hard with prayer, and “ Nay,”
They cried, “ Ah, bid us not our prayers to leave ;
Ah, father, not to-day, for this is Easter Eve.”

And, while they murmured, to their midst there came
A beggar saying, “ Brothers, peace, be still !
I am your Brother, in our Father’s name,
And I will be your porter, if ye will,
Guarding your gate with what I have of skill.”
So all they welcomed him and closed the door,
And gat them gladly back unto their prayers once more.

But, lo ! no sooner did the prayer arise,
A golden flame athwart the chancel dim,
Than came the porter crying, “ Haste, arise !
A sick old man waits you to tend on him ;
And many wait—a knight whose wound gapes grim,
A red-stained man, with red sins to confess,
A mother pale, who brings her child for you to bless.”

BALLADS AND VERSES

The brothers hastened to the gate, and there
With unaccustomed hand and voice they tried
To ease the body's pain, the spirit's care ;
But ere the task was done the porter cried :
" Behold, the Lord sets your gate open wide,
For here be starving folk who must be fed,
And little ones that cry for love and daily bread ! "

And, with each slow-foot hour, came ever a throng
Of piteous wanderers, sinful folk and sad,
And still the brothers ministered, but long
The day seemed, with no prayer to make them glad ;
No holy, meditative joys they had,
No moment's brooding-place could poor prayer find,
Mid all those hearts to heal and all those wounds to bind.

And when the crowded sunlit day at last
Left the field lonely with its trampled flowers,
Into the chapel's peace the brothers passed
To quell the memory of those hurrying hours.
" Our holy time," they said, " once more is ours !
Come, let us pay our debt of prayer and praise,
Forgetting in God's light the darkness of man's ways ! "

But, ere their voices reached the first psalm's end,
They heard a new, strange rustling round their house ;
Then came the porter : " Here comes many a friend,
Pushing aside your budding orchard boughs ;
Come, brothers, justify your holy vows.
Here be God's patient, poor, four-footed things
Seek healing at God's well, whence loving-kindness springs. "

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Then cried the Abbot in a vexed amaze,
“ Our brethren we must aid, if 'tis God's will ;
But the wild creatures of the forest ways
Himself God heals with His Almighty skill.
And charity is good, and love—but still
God shall not look in vain for the white prayers
We send on silver feet to climb the starry stairs ;

“ For, of all worthy things, prayer has most worth,
It rises like sweet incense up to heaven,
And from God's hand falls back upon the earth,
Being of heavenly bread the accepted leaven.
Through prayer is virtue saved and sin forgiven ;
In prayer the impulse and the force are found
That bring in purple and gold the fruitful seasons round.

“ For prayer comes down from heaven in the sun
That giveth life and joy to all things made ;
Prayer falls in rain to make broad rivers run
And quicken the seeds in earth's brown bosom laid ;
By prayer the red-hung branch is earthward weighed,
By prayer the barn grows full, and full the fold,
For by man's prayer God works his wonders manifold.”

The porter seemed to bow to the reproof ;
But when the echo of the night's last prayer
Died in the mystery of the vaulted roof,
A whispered memory in the hallowed air,
The Abbot turned to find him standing there.
“ Brother,” he said, “ I have healed the woodland things,
And they go happy and whole—blessing Love's ministerings.

BALLADS AND VERSES

“ And, having healed them, I shall crave your leave
To leave you—for to-night I journey far.
But I have kept your gate this Easter Eve,
And now your house to heaven shines like a star
To show the angels where God’s children are ;
And in this day your house has served God more
Than in the praise and prayer of all its years before.

“ Yet I must leave you, though I fain would stay,
For there are other gates I go to keep
Of houses round whose walls, long day by day,
Shut out of hope and love, poor sinners weep—
Barred folds that keep out God’s poor wandering sheep—
I must teach these that gates where God comes in
Must not be shut at all to pain, or want, or sin.

“ The voice of prayer is very soft and weak,
And sorrow and sin have voices very strong ;
Prayer is not heard in heaven when those twain speak,
The voice of prayer faints in the voice of wrong
By the just man endured—O Lord, how long ?—
If ye would have your prayers in heaven be heard,
Look that wrong clamour not with too intense a word.

“ But when true love is shed on want and sin,
Their cry is changed, and grows to such a voice
As clamours sweetly at heaven to be let in—
Such sound as makes the saints in heaven rejoice ;
Pure gold of prayer, purged of the vain alloys
Of idleness—that is the sound most dear
Of all the earthly sounds God leans from heaven to hear.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

“ Oh, brother, I must leave thee, and for Me
The work is heavy, and the burden great.
Thine be this charge I lay upon thee : See
That never again stands barred thy abbey gate ;
Look that God’s poor be not left desolate ;
Ah me ! that chidden My shepherds needs must be
When My poor wandering sheep have so great need of Me.

“ Brother, forgive thy Brother if He chide,
Thy Brother loves thee—and has loved—for see
The nails are in My hands, and in My side
The spear-wound ; and the thorns weigh heavily
Upon My brow—brother, I died for thee—
For thee, and for My sheep that are astray,
And rose to live for thee, and them, on Easter Day !”

“ My Master and my Lord !” the Abbot cried.
But, where that face had been, shone the new day ;
Only on the marble by the Abbot’s side,
Where those dear feet had stood, a lily lay—
A lily white for the white Easter Day.
He sought the gate—no sorrow clamoured there—
And, not till then, he dared to sink his soul in prayer.

And from that day himself he kept the gate
Wide open ; and the poor from far and wide,
The weary, and wicked, and disconsolate,
Came there for succour and were not denied ;
The sick were healed, the repentant sanctified ;
And from their hearts rises more prayer and praise
Than ever the abbey knew in all its prayer-filled days.

BALLADS AND VERSES

And there the Heavenly Vision comes no more,
Only, each Easter now, a lily sweet
Lies white and dewy on the chancel floor
Where once had stood the belovèd wounded feet ;
And the old Abbot feels the nearing beat
Of wings that bring him leave at last to go
And meet his Master, where the immortal lilies grow.

The Monk

WHEN in my narrow cell I lie,
The long day's penance done at last,
I see the ghosts of days gone by,
And hear the voices of the past.

I see the blue-gray wood-smoke curled
From hearths where life has rhymed to love,
I see the kingdoms of the world—
The glory and the power thereof,

And cry, "Ah, vainly have I striven!"
And then a voice calls, soft and low:
"Thou gavest My earth to win My heaven;
But heaven-on-earth thou mayest not know!"

It is not for Thy heaven, O Lord,
That I renounced Thy pleasant earth—
The ship, the furrow, and the sword—
The dreams of death, the dreams of birth!

BALLADS AND VERSES

Weary of vigil, fast, and prayer,
Weak in my hope and in my faith—
O Christ, for whom this cross I bear,
Meet me beside the gate of Death !

When the night comes, then let me rest
O Christ, who sanctifiest pain !
Falling asleep upon Thy breast,
And, if Thou wilt, wake never again !

The Crown of Life

THE days, the doubts, the dreams of pain
Are over, not to come again,
And from the menace of the night
Has dawned the day-star of delight :
My baby lies against me pressed !
Thus, Mother of God, are mothers blessed !

His little head upon my arm,
His little body soft and warm,
His little feet that cannot stand
Held in the heart of this, my hand.
His little mouth close on my breast—
Thus, Mary's Son, are mothers blessed.

All dreams of deeds, all deeds of day
Are very faint and far away,
Yet you some day will stand upright
And fight God's foes, in manhood's might,
You—tiny, worshipped, clasped, caressed—
Thus, Mother of God, are mothers blessed.

BALLADS AND VERSES

Whatever grief may come to be
This hour divine goes on for me.
All glorious is my little span,
Since I, like God, have made a man,
A little image of God's best—
Thus, Mary's Son, are mothers blessed.

Come change, come loss, come worlds of tears,
Come endless chain of empty years ;
They cannot take away the hour
That gives me You—my bird, my flower !
Thank God for this ! Leave God the rest !—
Thus, Mother of God, are mothers blessed.

Magnificat

THIS is Christ's birthday : long ago
He lay upon His mother's knee,
Who kissed and blessed Him soft and low—
God's gift to her, as you to me.

My baby dear, my little one,
The love that rocks this cradling breast
Is such as Mary gave her Son :
She was more honoured, not more blest.

He smiled as you smile : not more sweet
Than your eyes were those eyes of His,
And just such little hands and feet
As yours Our Lady used to kiss.

The world's desire that Mother bore :
She held a King upon her knee :
O King of all my world, and more
Than all the world's desire to me !

I thank God on the Christmas morn,
For He has given me all things good :
This body which a child has born,
This breast made holy for his food.

BALLADS AND VERSES

High in high heaven Our Lady's throne
Besides her Son's stands up apart :
I sit on heaven's steps alone
And hold my king against my heart.

Across dark depths she hears your cry ;
She sees your smile, through worlds of blue,
Who was a mother, even as I,
And loved her Child, as I love you.

And to her heart my babe is dear,
Because she bore the Babe Divine,
And all my soul to hers draws near,
And loves Him for the sake of mine !

Evening Prayer

Not to the terrible God, avenging, bright,
Whose altars struck their roots in flame and blood ;
Not to the jealous God, whose merciless might
The infamy of unclean years withstood ;
But to the God who lit the evening star,
Who taught the flower to blossom in delight,
Who taught His world what love and worship are,
We pray, we two, to-night.

To no vast Presence too immense to love,
To no enthronèd King too great to care,
To no strange Spirit human needs above,
We bring our little, intimate, heart-warm prayer ;
But to the God who is a Father too,
The Father who loved and gave His only Son,
We pray across the cradle, I and you,
For ours, our little one.

Christmas Hymn

O CHRIST, born on the holy day,
I have no gift to give my King ;
No flowers grow by my weary way ;
I have no birthday song to sing.

How can I sing Thy name and praise,
Who never saw Thy face divine ;
Who walk in darkness all my days,
And see no Eastern stars a-shine ?

Yet, when their Christmas gifts they bring,
How can I leave Thy praise unsung ?
How stay from homage to the King,
And hold a silent, grudging tongue ?

Lord, I found many a song to sing,
And many a humble hymn of praise
For Thy great Miracle of Spring,
The wonder of the waxing days.

When I beheld Thy days and years,
Did I not sing Thy pleasant earth ?
The moons of love, the years of tears,
The mysteries of death and birth ?

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Have I not sung with all my soul,
While soul and song were mine to yield,
Thy lightning crown, Thy cloud-control,
The dewy clover of Thy field?

Have I not loved Thy birds and beasts,
Thy streams and woods, Thy sun and shade ;
Have I not made me holy feasts
Of all the beauty Thou hast made?

What though my tear-tired eyes, alas !
Won never grace Thy face to see ?
I heard Thy footstep on the grass,
Thy voice in every wind-blown tree.

No music now I make or win ;
Yet, Lord, remember I have been
The lover of Thy world, wherein
I found nought common or unclean.

Grown old and blind, I sing no more ;
Thy saints in heaven sing sweet and strong, . .
Yet take the songs I made of yore
For echoes to Thy birthday song.

De Profundis

Now I am cast into the serpent pit
And, catching difficult breath
From the writhing, loathsome, ceaseless stir of it,
The venomous whispers of curling, clasping Death,
I lift my soul out of the pit to Thee,
And, reaching with my soul to where Thou art,
Look down, seeing with free heart
The beast God gave my soul for company
Lie with companions fit ;
And bid, with a good will,
The serpent fangs of ill
Take their full fill
Of the foul fell it wore.
Though a thousand serpent heads were raised to slay,
A thousand twisting coils writhed where it lay,
There lies the beast, there let it lie for me,
And agonise and rave ;
For thou hast raised my soul, Thy soul, to Thee !
Thy soul, dear Lord, Thou hast been strong to save !

Via Amoris

I

It is not Love, this beautiful unrest,
This tremor of longing that invades my breast,
For Love is in his grave this many a year ;
He will not rise—I do not wish him here.
It is not memory, for your face and eyes
Are not reflected where that dark pool lies :
It is not hope, for life makes no amends,
And hope and I are long no longer friends ;
It is a ghost out of another Spring,
It needs but little for its comforting—
That I should hold your hand and see your face
And muse a little in this quiet place
Where, through the silence, I can hear you sigh
And feel you sadden, O Virgin Mystery,
And know my thought has in your thought begot
Sadness, its child, and that you know it not.

II

If this were Love, if all this bitter pain
Were but the birth-pang of Love born again,

BALLADS AND VERSES

If through the doubts and dreams resolvèd, smiled
The prophetic promise of the Holy Child,
What should I gain? The love whose dream-lips smiled
Could never be my own and only child,
But to Love's birth would come, with the last pain,
Renunciation, also born again.

III

If this were Love, why should I turn away?
Am I not, too, made of the common clay?
Is life so fair, am I so fortunate,
I can refuse the capricious gift of Fate,
The sudden glory, the unhopèd-for flowers,
The transfiguration of my earthly hours?

Come, Love! the house is garnished and is swept,
Washed clean with all the tears that I have wept,
Washed from the stain of my unworthy fears,
Hung with the splendid spoils of wasted years,
Lighted with lamps of hope, and curtained fast
Against the gathered darkness of the past.

I draw the bolts, I throw the portals wide;
The darkness rushes shivering to my side.
Love is not here—the darkness creeps about
My house wherein the lamps of hope die out.
Ah, Love! it was not then your hand that came
Beating my door? your voice that called my name?

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

IV

“ It is not Love, it is not Love,” I said,
And bowed in fearful hope my trembling head.
“ It is not Love, for Love could never rise
Out of the rock-hewn grave wherein he lies.”
But as I spake, the heavenly form drew near,
Where close I clasped a hope grown keen as fear,
Upon my head His very hand He laid
And whispered, “ It is I, be not afraid !”

V

And this is Love, no rose-crowned, laughing guest
By whom my passionate heart should be caressed,
But one re-risen from the grave ; austere,
Cold as the grave and infinitely dear,
To follow whom I lay the whole world down,
Take up the cross, bind on the thorny crown ;
And, following whom, my bleeding pilgrim feet
Find the rough pathway sure and very sweet.
The august environment of mighty wings
Shuts out the snare of vain imaginings,
For by my side, crowned with Love's death-white rose,
The Angel of Renunciation goes.

Retro Sathanas

“ REFUSE, refrain, for this is not the love
The Annunciation Angel warned you of ;
This is the little candle, not the sun ;
It burns, but will not warm, unhappy one !”

“ But ah ! suppose the sun should never shine,
Then what an anguish of regret were mine
To know that even from this I turned away ?
Candles may serve, if there should be no day.”

“ Nay, better to go cold your whole life long
Than do the sun, than do your soul such wrong :
And if the sun shine not, be life's the blame,
And yours the pride, who scorned the meaner flame.”

The New Dispensation

OUT in the sun the buttercups are gold,
The daisies silver all the grassy lane,
And spring has given love a flower to hold,
And love lays blindness on the eyes of pain.

Within are still, chill aisles and blazoned panes
And carven tombs where memory weeps no more,
And from the lost and holy days remains
One saint beside the long-closed western door.

Outside the world goes laughing lest it weep,
With here and there some happy child at play,
A mother worshipping the babe asleep,
Or two young lovers dreaming 'neath the may.

Within, the soul of love broods o'er the place ;
The carven saint, forgotten many a year,
Still lifts to heaven his rapt adoring face
To pray for those who leave him lonely here,

That once again the silent church may ring
With songs of joy triumphant over pain—
Ah! God, who makest the miracle of spring,
Make Thou dead faith and love to rise again!

The Three Kings

WHEN the star in the East was lit to shine
The three kings journeyed to Palestine ;

They came from the uttermost parts of the earth
With long trains laden with gifts of worth.

The first king rode on a camel's back,
He came from the land where the kings are black,

Bringing treasures desired of kings,
Rubies and ivory and precious things.

An elephant carried the second king,
He came from the land of the sun-rising,

And gems and gold and spices he bare,
With brodered raiment for kings to wear.

The third king came without steed or train
From the misty land where the white kings reign

He bore no gifts save the myrrh in his hand,
For he came on foot from a far-off land.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Now when they had travelled a-many days
Through tangled forests and desert ways,

By angry seas and by paths thorn-set,
On Christmas Vigil the three kings met ;

And over their meeting a shrouded sky
Made dark the star they had travelled by.

Then the first king spake, and he frowned and said :

“ By some ill spell have our feet been led,

“ Now I see in the darkness the fools we are
To follow the light of a lying star.

“ Let us fool no more, but like kings and men
Each get him home to his land again ! ”

Then the second king, with the weary face
Gold-tinct as the sun of his reigning place,

Lifted sad eyes to the clouds and said :

“ It was but a dream, and the dream is sped.

“ We dreamed of a star that rose new and fair,
But it sets in the night of the old despair.

“ Yet night is faithful though stars betray,
It will lead to our kingdoms far away. ”

Then spake the king who had fared alone
From the far-off kingdom, the white-hung throne :

“ Oh, brothers, brothers, so very far
Ye have followed the light of the radiant star,

BALLADS AND VERSES

“ And because for a while ye see it not
Shall its faithful shining be all forgot ?

“ On the spirit's pathway the light still lies
Though the star be hid from our longing eyes.

“ To-morrow our star will be bright once more,
The little pin-hole in heaven's floor—

“ The angels pricked it to let it bring
Our feet to the throne of the new-born King !”

And the first king heard and the second king heard,
And their hearts grew humble before the third.

And they laid them down beside bale and beast
And their sleeping eyes saw light in the East,

For the angels fanned them with starry wings
And the waft of visions of unseen things.

And the next gold day waned trembling and white
As the star was born of the waxing night.

And the three kings came where the Great King lay,
A little baby among the hay.

The ox and the ass were standing near
And Mary Mother beside her Dear.

Then low in the litter the kings bowed down ;
They gave Him gold for a kingly crown,

And frankincense for a great God's breath,
And myrrh to sweeten the day of death.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Maiden Mother she stood and smiled
And she took from the manger her little child.

On the dark king's head she laid His hand
And anger died at that dear command.

She laid His hand on the gold king's head
And despair itself was comforted.

But when the pale king knelt in the stall
She heard on the straw his tears down fall.

And she stooped where he knelt beside her feet
And laid on his bosom her baby sweet.

And the king in the holy stable-place
Felt the little lips through the tears on his face.

* * * * *

Christ! lay Thy hand on the angry king
Who reigns in my breast to my undoing.

And lay Thy hands on the king who lays
The spell of sadness on all my days,

And give the white king—my soul, Thy soul—
Of these other kings the high control,

That soul and spirit and sense may meet
In adoration before Thy feet!

Now Glory to God the Father Most High,
And the Star, the Spirit, He leads us by.

And to God's dear Son, the Babe who was born
And laid in the manger on Christmas morn!

A Prayer for the King's Majesty

THE Queen is dead. God save the King !
In this his hour of grief,
When sorrow gathers memories in a sheaf
To lay them on his shoulders as he stands
Inheriting her glories and her lands—
First gain of his at which his Mother's voice
Has not been first to bless and to rejoice—
A man, set lonely between gain and loss,
(O words of love the heart remembereth,
O mighty loss outweighing every gain !)
A Son whose kingdom Death's arm lies across,
A King whose Mother lies alone with Death,
Wrapped in the folds of white implacable sleep.
O God, who seest the tears Thy children weep,
O God, who countest each sad heart-beat, see
How our King needs the grace we ask of Thee !
Thou knowest how little and how vain a thing
Is Empire, when the heart is sick with pain—
God save the King !

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Queen is dead. The splendour of her days,
The sorrow of them, both alike merge now
In the new aureole that lights her brow.
The clamour of her people's voice in praise
Must hush itself to the still voice that prays
In the holy chamber of Death. Tread softly here,
A mightly Queen lies dead.
Her people's heart wears black,
The black bells toll unceasing in their ear,
And on the gold sun's track
The great world round
Like a black ring the voice of mourning goes,
Till even our ancient foes
With eyes downbent, and brotherly bared head,
Keep mourning watch with us. This is the hour
When Love lends all his power
To speed grief's arrows from the bow of Death,
When sighs are idle breath,
When tears are fountains vain.
She will not wake again,
Not now, not here.
O great and good and infinitely dear,
O Mother of your people, sleep is sweet,
No more Life's thorny ways will wound your feet.

O Mother dear, sleep sound !
When you shall wake,
Your brows freed from the crown that made them ache
So many a time, and wear the heavenly crown
Then, then you will look down

BALLADS AND VERSES

On us who love you, and, remembering,
The love of earth will breathe with us our prayer,
—Our prayer prayed here, joined to your prayer prayed there,
Who knows what radiant answer it may bring?
“God save the King!”

The Queen is dead. God save the King!
From all ill thought and deed,
From heartless service and from selfish sway,
From treason, and the vain imagining
Of evil counsellors, and the noisesome breed
Of flatterers who eat the soul away,
God save the King!

From loss and pain and tears
Such as her many years
Brought her: from battle and strife,
And the inmost hurt of life,
The wounds that no crown can heal,
No ermine robes conceal,
God save the King!

God, by our memories of his Mother's face,
By the love that makes our heart her dwelling-place,
Grant to our sorrow this desired grace:
God save the King!

* * * * *

The Queen is dead. God save the King,
This is no hour when joy has leave to sing;
Only, amid our tears, we are bold to pray;
More boldly, in that we pray sorrowing,

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

In this most sorrowful day.

God, who wast of a mortal Mother born,
Who driest the tears with which Thy children mourn,
God save the King!

Look down on him whose crown is wet with tears
In which its splendour fades and disappears—
His tears, our tears, tears out of all her lands.
The Queen is dead.
God! strengthen the King's hands!
God save the King!

January 22, 1901.

In Memory of Saretta Deakin

WHO DIED ON OCTOBER 25TH, 1899

THERE was a day,
A horrible Autumn day,
When from her home, the home she made for ours
And that day made a nightmare of white flowers
And folk in black who whispered pityingly,
 They carried her away ;
 And left our hearts all cold
And empty, yet with such a store to hold
Of sodden grief the slow drops still ooze out,
And, falling on all fair things, they wither these ;
Tears came with time—but not with time went by.

And still we wander desolate about
The poor changed house, the garden and the croft,
Warm kitchen, sunny parlour, with the soft
Intolerable pervading memories
Of her whose face and voice made melodies,
Sweet unforgotten songs of mother-love—
Dear songs of all the little joys that were.
We see the sun and have no joy thereof,

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Because she gathered in her dying hands
And carried with her to the fair far lands
The flower of all our joy, because she went
Out of the garden where her days were spent,
And took the very sun away with her.

The cross stands at her head.
Over her breast, that loving mother-breast,
Close buds of pansies purple and white are pressed.
It seems a place for rest,
For happy folded sleep ; but ah, not there,
Not there, not there, our hardest tears are shed,
But in the house made empty for her sake.
Here, in the night intolerable, wake
The hungry passionate pains of Love still strong
To fight with Death the bitter slow night long.
Then the rich price that poor Love has to pay
Is paid, slow drop by drop, till the new day
With thin cold fingers pushes back night's wings,
And drags us out to common cruel things
That sting, and barb their stings with memory.
O Love—and is the price too hard to give?
Thine is the splendour of all things that live,
And this thy pain the price of life to thee—
The sacrament that binds to the beloved,
The chain that holds though mountains be removed,
The portent of thine immortality.

So, in the house of pain imprisoned, we
Endure our bondage, and work out our time,
Nor seek from out our dungeon walls to climb—

BALLADS AND VERSES

Bondsmen, who would not, if we could, be free.
Thank God, our hands still hold Love's cord—and she—
Do not her hands still clasp the cord we hold,
Drawing us near, coiling bright fold on fold,
Till the far day when it shall draw us near
To the sight of her—her living hands, her dear
Tired face, grown weary of watching for our face?
And we shall hold her, in the happy place,
And hear her voice, the old same voice we knew—
“ Ah ! children, I am tired of wanting you ! ”

Or, in some world more beautiful and dear
Than any she ever even dreamed of here,
Where time is changed, does she await the day
So longed for, and so little a while away,
When all the love we watered with our tears
Shall bloom, transplanted by the kindly years?
Dreaming through her new garden does she go,
Remembering the old garden, long ago,
Tending new flowers more fair than those that grow
In this sad garden where such sad flowers blow ;
And, fondly touching bud and leaf and shoot,
Training her flowers to perfect branch and root,
Does she sometimes entreat some darling flower
To wait a little for its opening hour?
Can you not hear her voice? “ Ah, not to-day,
While my dear flowers, my own, are far away.
Be patient, bud ! to-morrow soon will come :
Ah ! blossom when my little girl comes home ! ”

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

But now. But here.

The empty house, the always empty place—
The black remembrance that no night blots out,
The memories, white, unbearable, and dear
That no white sunlight makes less cruel and clear,
The resistless riotous rout
Of cruel conquering thoughts, the night, the day?
Love is immortal; this the price to pay.
Worse than all pain it would be to forget—
On Love's brave brow the crown of thorns is set.
Love is no niggard: though the price be high,
Into God's market Love goes forth to buy
With royal meed God's greatest gift and gain,
Love offers up his whole rich store of pain
And buys of God Love's immortality.

For DOROTHY, 18th August, 1900.

A Death-Bed

A man of like passions with ourselves

It is too late, too late !
The wine is spilled, the altar violate ;
Now all the foolish virtues of the past—
Its joys that could not last,
Its flowers that had to fade,
Its bliss so long delayed,
Its sun so soon o'ercast,
Its faith so soon betrayed,
Its prayers so madly prayed,
Its wildly-fought-for right,
Its dear renounced delight,
Its passions and its pain—
All these stand gray about
My bed, like ghosts from Paradise shut out,
And I, in torment, lying here alone,
See what myself have done—
How all good things were butchered, one by one.
Not one of these but life has fouled its name,
Blotted it out with sin and loss and shame—
Until my whole life's striving is made vain.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

It is too late, too late !

My house is left unto me desolate.

Yet what if here,

Through this despair too dark for dreams of fear,

Through the last bitterness of the last vain tear,

One saw a Face—

Human—not turned away from man's disgrace—

A Face divinely dear—

A Head that had a crown of thorns to wear ;

If there should come a hand

Drawing this tired head to a place of rest

On a most loving Breast ?

And as one felt that one could almost bear

To tell the whole long sickening trivial tale

Of how one came so utterly to fail

Of all one once knew that one might attain—

If one should feel consoling arms about,

Shutting one in, shutting the black past out—

Should feel the tears that washed one clean again,

And turn, made dumb with love and shame, to hear :

“ My child, my child, do I not understand ? ”

At The Prison Gate

And underneath us are the everlasting arms

ONCE by a foreign prison gate,
Deep in the gloom of frowning stone,
I saw a woman, desolate,
Sitting alone ;
Immeasurable pain enwound,
Infinite anguish lapped her round,
As the sea laps some sunken shore
Where flowers will blossom never more.

Despair sat shrined in her dry eyes ;
Her heart, I thought, in blood must weep
For hopes that never more can rise
From their death-sleep ;
And round her hovered phantoms gray,
Ghosts of delight dead many a day ;
And all the thorns of life seemed wed
In one sharp crown about her head.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

And all the poor world's aching heart
Beat there, I thought, and could not break.
Oh! to be strong to bear the smart—
The vast heart-ache!
Then through my soul a clear light shone;
What I would do, my Lord has done;
He bore the whole world's crown of thorn—
For her sake, too, that crown was worn.

The Devil's Due

A priest tells how, in his youth, a church was built by the free labour of love—as was men's wont in those days; and how the stone and wood were paid for by one who had grown rich on usury and the pillage of the poor—and of what chanced thereafter.

ARSENIUS, priest of God, I tell,
For warning in your younger ears,
Humbly and plainly what befel
That year—gone by a many years—
When Veraignes church was built. Ah! then
Brave churches grew 'neath hands of men:
We see not now their like again.

We built it on the green hill-side
That leans its bosom o'er the town,
So that its presence, sanctified,
Might ever on our lives look down.
We built; and those who built not, they
Brought us their blessing day by day,
And lingered to rejoice and pray.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

For years the masons toiled, for years
The craftsmen wrought till they had made
A church we scarce could see for tears—
Its fairness made our love afraid ;
Its clear-cut cream-white tracery
Stood out against the deep bright sky
Like good deeds 'gainst eternity.

In the deep roof each separate beam
Had its own garland—ivy, vine,
Giving to man the carver's dream,
In sight of men a certain sign—
And all day long the workers plied,
“The church shall finished be,” we cried,
“And consecrate by Easter-tide.”

Our church ! It was so fair, so dear,
So fit a church to praise God in !
It had such show of carven gear,
Such chiselled work, without, within
Such marble for the steps and floor,
Such window-jewels and such store
Of gold and gems the altar bore !

Each stone by loving hands was hewn,
By loving hands each beam was sawn ;
The hammers made a merry tune
In winter dusk and summer dawn.
Love built the house, but gold had paid
For that wherewith the house was made,
“Would love have given all !” we said.

BALLADS AND VERSES

But poor in all save love were we,
And he was poor in all save gold
Who gave the gold. By usury
Were gained his riches manifold.
We knew it? If we knew, we thought
'Tis good if men do good in aught,
And by good works may heaven be bought!

At last the echo died in air
Of the last stroke. The silence then
Passed in to fill the church, left bare
Of the loving voice of Christian men.
The silence saddened all the sun;
So gladly was our work begun.
Now all that happy work was done.

Did any voices in the night
Call through those arches? Were there wings
That swept between the pillars white—
Wide pinions of unvisioned things?
The priests who watched the relics heard
Wing-whispers—not of bat or bird—
And moan of inarticulate word.

Then sunlight, morning, and sweet air
Adorned our church, and there were borne
Great sheaves of boughs of blossom fair
To grace the consecration morn.
Then round our church trooped knight and dame;
Within, alone, the bishop came,
And the twelve candles leaped to flame.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Then round our church the bishop went
With all his priests—a brave array.
There was no sign nor portent sent
As, glad at heart, he went his way,
Sprinkling the holy water round
Three times on walls and crowd and ground
Within the churchyard's sacred bound.

Then—but ye know the function's scope
At consecration—all the show
Of torch and incense, stole and cope ;
And how the acolytes do go
Before the bishop—how they bear
The lighted tapers, flaming fair,
Blown back by the sweet wavering air.

The bishop, knocking at the door,
The deacon answering from within,
“ Lift up your heads, ye gates, be sure
The King of Glory shall come in ”—
The bishop passed in with the choir.
Thank God for this—our soul's desire,
Our altar, meet for heaven's fire !

The bishop, kneeling in his place
Where our bright windows made day dim,
With all heaven's glory in his face,
Began the consecration hymn :
“ *Veni,*” he sang, in clear strong tone.
Then—on the instant—song was done,
Its very echo scattered—gone !

BALLADS AND VERSES

For, as the bishop's voice rang clear,
 Another voice rang clearer still—
A voice wherein the soul could hear
 The discord of unmeasured ill—
And sudden breathless silence fell
On all the church. And I wot well
There are such silences in hell.

Taper and torch died down, went out,
 And all our church grew dark and cold,
And deathly odours crept about,
 And chill, as of the churchyard mould ;
And every flower drooped its head,
And all the rose's leaves were shed,
And all the lilies dropped down dead.

There, in the bishop's chair, we saw—
 How can I tell you? Memories shrink
To mix anew the cup of awe
 We shuddering mortals had to drink.
What was it? There! The shape that stood
Before the altar and the rood—
It was not human flesh and blood.

A light more bright than any sun,
 A shade more dark than any night,
A shape that human shape was none.
 A cloud, a sense of wingèd might,
And, like an infernal trumpet-sound,
Rang through the church's hush profound
A voice. We listened horror-bound.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

“ *Venio!* Cease, cease to consecrate !
Love built the church, but it is mine !
'Tis built of stone hewn out by hate,
Cemented by man's blood divine.
Whence came the gold that paid for this ?
From pillage of the poor I wis—
That gold was mine, and mine this is !

“ Your King has cursed the usurer's gold,
He gives it to me for my fee !
Your church is builded, but behold
Your church is fair for me—for me !
Who robs the poor to me is given ;
Impenitent and unforgiven,
His church is built for hell, not heaven !”

Then, as we gazed, the face grew clear,
And all men stood as turned to stone ;
Each man beheld through dews of fear
A face—his own, yet not his own ;
His own face, darkened, lost, debased,
With hell's own signet stamped and traced,
And all the God in it effaced.

A crash like thunder shook the walls,
A flame like lightning shot them through :
“ Fly, fly before the judgment falls,
And all the stones be fallen on you !”
And as we fled we saw bright gleams
Of fire leap out 'mid joists and beams.
Out church ! Oh, love, oh, hopes, oh, dreams !

BALLADS AND VERSES

We stood without, a pallid throng,
And as the flame leaped high and higher,
Shrill winds we heard that rushed along
And fanned the transports of the fire.
The sky grew black ; against the sky
The blue and scarlet flames leaped high,
And cries as of lost souls wailed by.

The church in glowing vesture stood,
The lead ran down as it were wax,
The great stones cracked and burned like wood,
The wood caught fire and flamed like flax :
A horrid chequered light and shade,
By smoke and flame alternate made,
Upon men's upturned faces played.

Down crashed the walls. Our lovely spire,
A blackened ruin, fell and lay,
The very earth about caught fire,
And flame-tongues licked along the clay.
The fire did neither stay nor spare
Till the foundations were laid bare
To the hot, sickened, smoke-filled air,

There in the sight of men it lay,
Our church that we had made so fair !
A heap of ashes white and gray,
With sparks still gleaming here and there.
The sun came out again and shone
On all our loving work undone—
Our church destroyed, our labour gone !

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Gone? Is it gone? God knows it, no!
The hands that builded built aright:
The men who loved and laboured so,
Their church is built in heaven's height!
In every stone a glittering gem,
Gold in the gold Jerusalem—
The church their love built waits for them.

Ruckinge Church

“And we said how dreary and desolate and forlorn the church was, and how long it was since any music but that of the moth-eaten harmonium and the heartless mixed choir had sounded there. And we said: ‘Poor old church! it will never hear any true music any more.’ Then she turned to us from the door of the Lady Chapel, which was plastered and whitewashed, and had a stove and the Evangelical Almanac in it, and her eyes were full of tears. And, standing there, she sang the ‘Ave Maria’—with her voice and her face like an angel’s. And while she sang a stranger came to the church door and stood listening, but he did not see us. Only we saw that he loved her singing. And he went away as soon as the hymn was ended, we also soon following, and the church was left lonely as before.”

THE boat crept slowly through the water-weeds
 That greenly cover all the waterways,
 Between high banks where ranks of sedge and reeds
 Sigh one sad secret all their quiet days,
 Through grasses water-mint and rushes green,
 And flags and strange wet blossoms, only seen
 Where man so seldom comes, so briefly stays.

From the high bank the sheep looked calmly down,
 Unscared to see my boat and me go by;
 The elm-trees showed their dress of golden brown
 To winds that should disrobe them presently;
 And a marsh sunset flamed across the wold,
 And the still water caught the lavished gold,
 The primrose and the purple of the sky.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The boat pressed ever through the weeds and sedge
Which, rustling, clung her steadfast prow around ;
The iris nodded at the water's edge,
Bats in the elm-trees made a ghostly sound ;
With whirring wings a wild duck sprang to sight
And flew, black-winged, towards the crimson light,
Leaving my solitude the more profound.

We moved towards the church, my boat and I—
The church that at the marsh edge stands alone ;
It caught the reflex of the sunset sky
On golden-lichened roof and gray-green stone.
Through snow and shower and sunshine it had stood
In the thronged graveyards infinite solitude,
While many a year had come, and flowered, and gone.

From the marsh-meadow to the field of graves
But just a step, across a lichened wall.
Thick o'er the happy dead the marsh grass waves,
And cloudy wreaths of marsh mist gather and fall,
And the marsh sunsets shed their gold and red
Over still hearts that once in torment fed
At Life's intolerable festival.

The plaster of the porch has fallen away
From the lean stones, that now are all awry,
And through the chinks a shooting ivy spray
Creeps in—sad emblem of fidelity—
And wreathes with life the pillars and the beams
Hewn long ago—with, ah ! what faith, what dreams !—
By men whose faith and dreams have long gone by.

BALLADS AND VERSES

The rusty key, the heavy rotten door,
The dead, unhappy air, the pillars green
With mould and damp, the desecrated floor
With bricks and boards where tombstones should have
been,

And were once ; all the musty, dreary chill—
They strike a shudder through my being still
When memory lights again that lightless scene.

And where the altar stood, and where the Christ
Reached out His arms to all the world, there stood
Law-tables—as if love had not sufficed

To all the world has ever known of good !
Our Lady's chapel was a lightless shrine ;
There was no human heart and no divine,
No odour of prayer, no altar, and no rood.

There was no scent of incense in the air,
No sigh of all the past breathed through the aisle,
The white glass windows turned to mocking glare

The lovely sunset's gracious rosy smile ;
A vault, a tomb wherein was laid to sleep
All that a man might give his life to keep
If only for an instant's breathing while !

Cold with my rage against the men who held
At such cheap rate the labours of the dead,
My heart within me sank, while o'er it swelled

A sadness that would not be comforted ;
An awe came on me, and I seemed to face
The invisible spirit of the dreary place,
To hear the unheard voice of it, which said :—

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

“ Is love, then, dead upon earth ?
Ah ! who shall tell or be told
What my walls were once worth
When men worked for love, not for gold ?
Each stone was made to hold
A heartful of love and faith ;
Now love and faith are dead,
Dead are the prayers that are said,
Nothing is living but Death !

“ Oh ! for the old glad days,
Incense thick in the air,
Passion of thanks and of praise,
Passion of trust and of prayer !
Ah ! the old days were fair,
Love on the earth was then,
Strong were men’s souls, and brave :
Those men lie in the grave,
They will live not again !

“ Then all my arches rang
With music glorious and sweet,
Men’s souls burned as they sang,
Tears fell down at their feet,
Hearts with the Christ-heart beat,
Hands to men’s hands held fast ;
Union and brotherhood were !
Ah ! the old days were fair,
Therefore the old days passed.

BALLADS AND VERSES

“ Then, when later there came
 Hatred, anger and strife,
The sword blood-red and the flame,
 And the stake and contempt of life,
 Husband severed from wife ;
Hearts with the Christ-heart bled :
 Through the worst of the fight
 Still the old fire burned bright,
Still the old faith was not dead.

“ Though they tore my Christ from the cross,
 And mocked at the Mother of Grace,
And broke my windows across,
 Defiling the holy place—
 Children of death and disgrace !
They spat on the altar-stone,
 Tore down and trampled the rood
 Stained my pillars with blood,
Left me lifeless, alone—

“ Yet, when my walls were left !
 Robbed of all beauty and bare,
Still God cancelled the theft,
 The soul of the thing was there.
 In my damp, unwindowed air
Fugitives stopped to pray,
 And their prayers were splendid to hear,
 Like the sound of a storm that is near—
And love was not dead that day.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

“Then the birds of the air built nests
In these empty shadows of mine,
And the warmth of their brooding breasts
Still warmed the untended shrine.
His creatures are all divine,
He is praised by the woodland throng,
And my old walls echoed and heard
The passionate praising word,
And love still lived in their song.

“Then came the Protestant crew
And made me the thing you have known—
Whitewashed and plastered me new,
Covered my marble and stone—
Could they not leave me alone?
Vain was the cry, for they trod
Over my tombs, and I saw
Books and the Tables of Law
Set in the place of my God

“And love is dead, so it seems!
Shall I never hear again
The music of heaven and of dreams,
Songs of ideals of men?
Great dreams and songs we had then,
Now I but hear from the wood
Cry of a bat or a bird.
Oh! for love's passionate word
Sent from men's hearts to the Good!

BALLADS AND VERSES

“Sometimes men come, and they sing,
But I know not their song nor their voice ;
They have no hearts they can bring,
They have no souls to rejoice—
Theirs is but folly and noise.
Oh ! for a voice that could sing
Songs to the Queen of the blest,
Hymns to the Dearest and Best,
Songs to our Master, her King !”

The church was full of silence. I shut in
Its loss and loneliness, and went my way.
Its sadness was not less its walls within
Because I wore it in my heart that day,
And many a day since, when I see again
Marsh sunsets, and across the golden plain
The church's golden roof and arches gray.

* * * * *

Along wet roads, all shining with late rain,
And through wet woods, all dripping, brown and sere,
I came one day towards the church again.
It was the spring-time of the day and year ;
The sky was light and bright and flecked with cloud
That, wind-swept, changeful, through bright rents allowed
Sun and blue sky to smile and disappear.

The sky behind the old gray church was gray—
Gray as my memories, and gray as I ;
The forlorn graves each side the grassy way
Called to me, “ Brother ! ” as I passed them by.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The door was open. "I shall feel again,"
I thought, "that inextinguishable pain
Of longing loss and hopeless memory."

When—O electric flash of ecstasy!
No spirit's moan of pain fell on my ear—
A human voice, an angel's melody,
God let me in that perfect moment hear.
Oh! the sweet rush of gladness and delight,
Of human striving to the heavenly light,
Of great ideals, permanent and dear!

All the old dreams linked with the new-born faith,
All the old faith with new-born dreams enwound,
Surged through the very heart of loss and death
In passionate waves of pure and perfect sound.
The past came back: the Christ, the Mother-Maid,
The incense of the hearts that praised and prayed,
The past's peace, and the future's faith profound.

*"Ave Maria,
Gratiâ plena,
Dominus tecum:
Benedicta tu
In mulieribus,
Et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.
Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,
Ora pro nobis peccatoribus
Nunc et in horâ mortis nostræ. Amen."*

BALLADS AND VERSES

And all the soul of all the past was here—

A human soul that loved the great and good,
A heart to which the great ideals were dear,

One that had heard and that had understood,
As I had done, the church's desolate moan,
And answered it as I had never done,
And never willed to do and never could.

I left the church, glad to the soul and strong,

And passed along by fresh earth-scented ways ;

Safe in my heart the echo of that song

Lived, as it will live with me all my days.
The church will never lose that echo, nor
Be quite as lonely ever any more ;
Nor will my soul, where, too, that echo stays.

The Singing of the Magnificat

A Legend

IN midst of wide green pasture-lands, cut through
By lines of alders bordering deep-banked streams,
Where bulrushes and yellow iris grew,
And rest and peace, and all the flowers of dreams,
The Abbey stood—so still, it seemed a part
Of the marsh-country's almost pulseless heart.

Where gray-green willows fringed the stream and pool,
The lazy meek-faced cattle strayed to graze,
Sheep in the meadows cropped the grasses cool,
And silver fish shone through the watery ways,
And many a load of fruit and load of corn
Into the Abbey storehouses was borne.

Yet though so much they had of life's good things,
The monks but held them as a sacred trust
Lent from the storehouse of the King of kings
Till they, His stewards, should crumble back to dust.
"Not as our own," they said, "but as the Lord's,
All that the stream yields, or the land affords."

BALLADS AND VERSES

And all the villages and hamlets near
Knew the monks' wealth, and how their wealth was
spent ;
In tribulation, sickness, want, or fear,
First to the Abbey all the peasants went,
Certain to find a welcome, and to be
Helped in the hour of their extremity.

When plague or sickness smote the people sore,
The Brothers prayed beside the dying bed,
And nursed the sick back into health once more,
And through the horror and the danger said :
“ How good is God, who has such love for us,
He lets us tend His suffering children thus ! ”

They in their simple ways and works were glad :
Yet all men must have sorrows of their own ;
And so a bitter grief the Brothers had,
Nor mourned for others' heaviness alone.
This was the secret of their sorrowing,
That not a monk in all the house could sing !

Was it the damp air from the lovely marsh,
Or strain of scarcely intermitted prayer,
That made their voices, when they sang, as harsh
As any frog's that croaks in evening air—
That made less music in their hymns to lie,
Than in the hoarsest wild-fowl's hoarsest cry ?

If love could sweeten voice to sing a song,
Theirs had been sweetest song was ever sung :

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

But their hearts' music reached their lips all wrong,
The soul's intent foiled by the traitorous tongue
That marred the chapel's peace, and seemed to scare
The rapt devotion lingering in the air.

The birds that in the chapel built their nests,
And in the stone-work found their small lives fair,
Flew thence with hurried wings and fluttering breasts
When the bell rang to call the monks to prayer.
"Why will they sing," they twittered, "why at all?
In heaven their silence must be festival!"

The Brothers prayed with penance and with tears
That God would let them give some little part
Out for the solace of their own sad ears
Of all the music crowded in their heart.
Their nature and the marsh-air had their way,
And still they sang more vilely every day.

And all their prayers and fasts availing not
To give them voices sweet, their souls' desire,
The Abbot said, "Gifts He did not allot
God at our hands will not again require;
The love He gives us He will ask again
In love to Him and to our fellow-men.

"Praise Him we must, and since we cannot praise
As we would choose, we praise Him as we can.
In heaven we shall be taught the angels' ways
Of singing—we afford to wait a span.
In singing, as in toil, do ye your best;
God will adjust the balance—do the rest!"

BALLADS AND VERSES

But one good Brother, anxious to remove
This, the reproach now laid on them so long,
Rejected counsel, and for very love
Besought a brother, skilled in art of song,
To come to them—his cloister far to leave—
And sing *Magnificat* on Christmas Eve.

So when each brown monk duly sought his place,
By two and two, slow pacing to the choir,
Shrined in his dark oak stall, the strange monk's face
Shone with a light as of devotion's fire,
Good, young and fair, his seemed a form wherein
Pure beauty left no room at all for sin.

And when the time for singing it had come,
“*Magnificat*,” face raised, and voice, he sang :
Each in his stall the monks stood glad and dumb,
As through the chancel's dusk his voice outrang,
Pure, clear, and perfect—as the thrushes sing
Their first impulsive welcome of the spring.

At the first notes the Abbot's heart spoke low :
“O God, accept this singing, seeing we,
Had we the power, would ever praise Thee so—
Would ever, Lord, Thou know'st, sing thus to Thee ;
Thus in our hearts Thy hymns are ever sung,
As he Thou blassest sings them with his tongue.”

But as the voice rose higher, and more sweet,
The Abbot's heart said, “Thou hast heard us grieve,
And sent an angel from beside Thy feet,
To sing *Magnificat* on Christmas Eve ;

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

To ease our ache of soul, and let us see
How we some day in heaven shall sing to Thee."

Through the cold Christmas night the hymn rang out
In perfect cadence, clear as sunlit rain—
Such heavenly music that the birds without
Beat their warm wings against the window pane,
Scattering the frosted crystal snow outspread
Upon the stone-lace and the window-lead.

The white moon through the window seemed to gaze
On the pure face and eyes the singer raised ;
The storm-wind hushed the clamour of its ways,
God seemed to stoop to hear Himself thus praised,
And breathless all the Brothers stood, and still
Reached longing souls out to the music's thrill.

Old years came back, and half-forgotten hours,
Dreams of delight that never was to be,
Mothers' remembered kiss, the funeral flowers
Laid on the grave of life's felicity ;
An infinite dear passion of regret
Swept through their hearts, and left their eyelids wet.

The birds beat ever at the window, till
They broke the pane, and so could entrance win ;
Their slender feet clung to the window-sill,
And though with them the bitter air came in,
The monks were glad that the birds too should hear,
Since to God's creatures all, His praise is dear.

BALLADS AND VERSES

The lovely music waxed and waned, and sank,
And brought less conscious sadness in its train,
Unrecognised despair that thinks to thank
God for a joy renounced, a chosen pain—
And deems that peace which is but stifled life
Dulled by a too-prolonged unfruitful strife.

When, service done, the Brothers gathered round
To thank the singer—modest-eyed, said he :
“ Not mine the grace, if grace indeed abound ;
God gave the power, if any power there be ;
If I in hymn or psalm clear voice can raise,
As His the gift, so His be all the praise ! ”

That night—the Abbot lying on his bed—
A sudden flood of radiance on him fell,
Poured from the crucifix above his head,
And cast a stream of light across his cell—
And in the fullest fervour of the light
An Angel stood, great, glittering, and white.

His wings of thousand rainbow clouds seem made,
A thousand lamps of love shone in his eyes,
The light of dawn upon his brows was laid,
Odours of all the flowers of Paradise
Filled all the cell, and through the heart there stirred
A sense of music that could not be heard.

The Angel spoke—his voice was low and sweet
As the sea's murmur on low-lying shore,
Or whisper of the wind in ripened wheat :
“ Brother,” he said, “ the God we both adore

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Has sent me down to ask, is all not right?—
Why was *Magnificat* not sung to-night?"

Tranced in the joy the Angel's presence brought,
The Abbot answered: "All these weary years
We have sung our best—but always have we thought
Our voices were unworthy heavenly ears;
And so to-night we found a clearer tongue,
And by it the *Magnificat* was sung."

The Angel answered: "All these happy years
In heaven has your *Magnificat* been heard;
This night alone, the angels' listening ears
Of all its music caught no single word.
Say, who is he whose goodness is not strong
Enough to bear the burden of his song?"

The Abbot named his name. "Ah, why," he cried,
"Have angels heard not what we found so dear?"
"Only pure hearts," the Angel's voice replied,
"Can carry human songs up to God's ear;
To-night in heaven was missed the sweetest praise
That ever rises from earth's mud-stained maze."

"The monk who sang *Magnificat* is filled
With lust of praise, and with hypocrisy;
He sings for earth—in heaven his notes are stilled
By muffling weight of deadening vanity;
His heart is chained to earth, and cannot bear
His singing higher than the listening air!

BALLADS AND VERSES

“ From purest hearts most perfect music springs
And while you mourned your voices were not sweet
Marred by the accident of earthly things,—
In heaven, God, listening, judged your song complete.
The sweetest of earth’s music came from you,
The music of a noble life and true ! ”

Earth and Heaven

["The mother of St. Simeon Stylites, hearing of his fame, came to see him, but was not allowed to enter the enclosure round the pillar. But when Simeon heard his mother's voice, he said to her, 'Bear up, my mother, a little while, and we shall see each other, if God will.' But she began to weep and to rebuke him, saying, 'Son, why hast thou done this? In return for the body I bore thee, thou hast filled me with grief. For the milk with which I nourished thee, thou hast given me tears. For the kiss with which I kissed thee, thou hast given me an aching heart. . . .' Simeon, on his pillar, was deeply agitated, and covering his face with his hands, he wept bitterly and cried to her, 'O lady mother, be still a little while, and we shall see each other in eternal rest.' The poor mother, with harrowed heart, hung about the place for three days, crying to her son, and wrung with grief to see his terrible penance, . . . and at the end of those three days she fell asleep. . . . And he, weeping, said, 'The Lord receive thee in joy, mother,' etc."—*Lives of the Saints*. S. Baring-Gould.]

HERE Time is strange, and keeps no even speed

As once, but checked or sped by dreams moves on :

Whether it was or was not so, indeed,

I hardly know ; but some four days ago

I thought she came, came near the enclosed space

Which men have walled about my pillar's base.

BALLADS AND VERSES

(O mother ! In her eyes was all the woe
That has been gathering there these many years,
Since that first day, a thousand lives ago,
When she watched for me, racked with doubts and fears :
And I was lying at the convent gate
Awaiting the unfolding of my fate.)

And there she stood. They would not let her in.
She reached her hands out to me, and she cried,
And beat her breast and moaned. (Oh me ! my sin !
This rebel soul not yet is sanctified !
Pardon, O God, that this weak heart did ache
With earthly sorrow for that woman's sake !)

And then I heard her voice : " My son, my son,
Why wilt thou shame God's body in this wise ?
What is this sacrilege that thou hast done ?
How wilt thou meet the Blessed Mother's eyes,
And hear her ask thee what thou gavest me
For that fair body which I bore for thee ? "

Then cried I—God forgive, if I did ill—
" Bear up, my mother, yet a little while,
And we shall see each other, if God will.
Pray, pray still, ever pray." And then (O vile !
To grieve for earthly things) I, also, wept,
As through my heart chill winds of memory crept.

And then I thought—and yet it may have been
Only a craft of Satan, tempting me—
I thought she wrung her hands, and let be seen
The mother's breast that once had nourished me,

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

And wept again, and spake ; and every word
Pierced to the fleshly heart of me who heard.

“ Oh, son, I pray no more ! For once I prayed
A boon of God for sweetening of my days,
A little baby that should soft be laid
Upon my bosom—to His endless praise.
At last God heard my cry—thee did I bear,
The inexorable answer to my prayer !

“ O little baby hands I used to kiss,
Cold, hard, and wasted—reached not out to me.
Mother of Christ, judge thou how hard it is
To bear such wounds as in his feet I see—
O little pink dear feet I used to hold,
Kissed now but by fierce sun and night winds cold !

“ Ah ! when I hushed thee on my happy breast
And sang thee whispered lullabies, and strove
To see the future—work, and help, and rest,
And good deeds done of thee, child of my love—
Why did no angel blast such sweet vain schemes,
And shed truth's withering light upon my dreams ?

“ Thou wert God's answer to my prayer. And thou,
Who bade thee thus to mar God's gift and mine,
Thy body ? Not the Lord of heaven, I trow,
Who wore on earth a body like to thine.
He had a mother, too ; yet day by day
Thou darest to raise thy hands to Him and pray !”

BALLADS AND VERSES

Then I spoke—I, not yet as saintly-still

As penance should have made me, beat my breast :

“ Patience, O lady mother ! If God will,

We two shall meet in an eternal rest ! ”

“ But, oh,” she cried, “ the human life divine
Was that in which God gave thee to be mine !

“ Not for another life than this I bore

Travail and agony of thy birth morn,

The joy unspeakable that pain no more

Could touch or mar, when my man-child was born.

For this life wert thou born—and, O my son,

With life, God’s gift, what good thing hast thou done ?

“ Thou hast brought souls to God ? Poor souls that find,

No refuge save the God thou dreamest of !

A God who loves to see sad eyes wept blind,

Flesh wounded, and dead hearts cast out of love !

Better the heathen’s life of soulless bliss

Than faith in such a Devil-God as this !

“ What was it pricked thee on to this thy sin ?

What but desire that men should kneel and say,

‘ See—the great saint—the holy man, wherein

All fleshly lusts that sting our flesh to-day

Are dead.’ Ay ! all but pride, that finds no ways

Too sharp to tread, to meet a sick world’s praise.

“ And now I know thou art too proud to heed

My voice—too high for me to reach thee there,

Too small a thing it is, my heart’s great need,

That thou, my body’s fruit, shouldst know or care ;

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Thou, thou wouldst save thy soul and heaven win
By slighting earth, that God has set thee in !

“ Earth was thy home, on earth thy duties lay ;
And heaven lives on earth, in duties done.
O son, Christ weeps to see thee turned away
From that straight simple way He set thee on.
Thy soul? Thy soul! The devil would not crave
That stunted, crippled soul thou seekst to save !”

She ceased. Her body, like a drooping flower,
Bowed towards earth, and she was borne away ;
But I—have mercy, God—for one mad hour
I might not, would not, could not, dared not pray ;
For all her words shrieked in my ears again,
And all my penances and prayers looked vain.

The royal sun in robes of gold had passed
Below the rocks and palm-trees in the west,
The long hard shadow that my pillar cast
Grew dim and vague. The sense of coming rest
Fell on all happy living things, and I
Got strength to pray again, and night went by.

With the new sun she came once more. Her cry,
Strong with a night of prayer, I would not hear.
I turned my eyes up to the blazing sky,
Wrestling in prayer and sealing up mine ear.
Yet there she stood all day and gazed on me ;
For my heart knew it though I would not see.

BALLADS AND VERSES

Another night of prayer, another day

Of words I would not hear, though my heart heard.
And then that evening, when I heard men say

“She is dead!”—O God, forgive my first mad word—
“God, be my soul damned in hell’s fiercest pain,
But give my mother back to me again!”

But all the people crowded round. I knew

They waited for the holy man to speak.
What could I say to them? what could I do
To hide from them how wildly flesh was weak?
I spoke—and what I said I know no more—
’Twas not the thoughts with which my heart was sore!

I think I said what other men would say

I should have said—gave thanks to God that she
From this vile world had so been caught away
Into the glory where I hoped to be.
And this I said the anguish to conceal
I felt—but felt that it was sin to feel.

But when the night had come, the people gone,

When ’twixt the silent earth and silent sky
I on my pillar was alone—alone
As I must be till life’s last night pass by—
The world looked black, the sky was cloudy gray,
And even my pillar seemed to fade away.

And only I—’twixt heaven and earth—was there;

For heaven I could not find, and earth was lost.
I seemed to drift through chill and misty air,
In vague cloud-depths by storm-winds driven and tossed,

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Still floating on—long ages did it seem—
I, more a shadow than man's lightest dream—

And still alone. At last—the darkness riven—

A light—a presence ! and my whole soul cried :
“ I am lost, I am lost ! O God, where is Thy heaven
For which I gave up love and all beside ?
How shall I find the garden of the blest
Where Christ and all His angels feast and rest ? ”

And then I heard a voice that filled the skies,

Most terrible, most sweet, and answered me :
“ Heaven was on earth, the earth thou didst despise,
And now for ever it is lost to thee ;
And on the earth Christ is, and on the earth
The love thou hast accounted nothing worth.

“ None for himself a heaven can win or make,

Since whoso seeks his life his life shall lose.
He who will labour for a sad world's sake,
And free pure life revile not nor refuse,
He is Christ's man ; he hath the better part ;
The angels dwell for ever in his heart.

“ Where is a heaven but on the earth—for man ?

What other life for man is there but one ?
Heaven, and the way to heaven lie in that span,
Eternal are the done and the undone.
Thine were the penance, prayer, and sun and frost,
Thine the earth wasted, and the heaven lost ! ”

BALLADS AND VERSES

The vision faded, and I woke to earth ;
The night had fled away, the sky was fair
With lovely lights to greet the new day's birth ;
They shone upon my pillar, high in air,
And on my body, maimed and seared, and thin
With the hard penance I have trusted in.

It is too late—too late ! If this be true,
And all my life be wrong, at least I know
I did but what I thought God bade me do,
And went the way I thought he bade me go !
'Tis Satan tempts me with these dreams and fears.
'Twas he who tempted through my mother's tears.

Oh, mother, if it had been otherwise !
It could not be—life then had been too sweet !
How can smooth pathways lead to Paradise,
Or heaven be on earth, time being so fleet ?
Back, Satan—I have fought and won the fight.
Life was so hard, it could not but be right !

To Our Lady

(For a Picture by Giovanni Bellini)

DEAR Mother, in whose eyes I see
All that I would and cannot be,
Let thy pure light for ever shine,
Though dimly, through this life of mine !

Though what I dream, and what I do,
In prayer's despite are always two,
Light me, through maze of deeds undone,
O thou whose deeds and dreams are one !

And though through mists of strife and tears,
A world away my star appears,
Yet let Death's sunrise shine on me,
Still reaching arms and heart to thee !

Refugium Peccatorum

“For all human things do require to have an ideal in them . . . were it only to keep the body unputrefied.”—*Carlyle*

OUR Lady's chapel is ablaze with light
That burns against the close-pressed face of night ;
The echo of long centuries of prayer
Is mingled with the incense in the air,
And every soul that once breathed there a vow
Joins with the souls of those who pray there now.

And there, within the taper's softened glow,
Amid the flowers that in girls' gardens grow,
The lovely image of the Mother stands—
Stands with her little baby in her hands,
And in her eyes, and in her perfect face,
The eternal promise of ideal grace.

A woman, passing down the quiet street,
Heard sudden sound of singing voices sweet
That seemed to call her in from out the night
To where it rose, through floods of softened light.
The music caught and held her sense as fast
As souls are held by fetters of their past.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

O Mother-maiden—what a woman-face !
Sordidly sensual, unlovely, base,
Scored with coarse lines burnt in by years of wrong,
Stamped with the signet of the vile and strong ;
Hopeless, impure, with eyes unwashed by tears
Through many soulless, desecrated years.

She sat there stupid, broken, lost, defiled,
Before pure mother and ideal child ;
She on whose barren breast no little hand
Had ever rested in divine command,
She who had never known the unnamed bliss
Which thrills a mother through her baby's kiss.

How strange and sweet that music was ! She heard
The clear note of a long-forgotten bird—
A certain thrush which used to come and sing
Upon the sweet-plumed lilac in the spring
When she was young, and there was time to think
Of other things than devilry and drink.

That cottage garden—with its hollyhocks
Each side the porch—its gray and purple stocks,
The sweetbriar hedge, the climbing yellow rose,
How long it was since she had thought of those !
Such memories quickly fade in gaslit hours,
'Mid patchouli and tawdry hothouse flowers.

There was a church at home—she minded well
Its ghastly tales of sin and death and hell ;
Yet it was pleasant in the summer days
To walk there through the quiet meadow ways

BALLADS AND VERSES

And through the cornfields where the poppies grow—
Or grew once—bright as life seemed, long ago.

And then the churchyard on the thymy hill
Where the bees murmur and the world is still,
One grave is there wherein there buried lies
Something beyond a mother's heart and eyes :
A woman's soul—her soul—might have been spared
Had there been any one on earth who cared.

Hark—someone's speaking ! Listen, what says he ?
“ In that dear heaven, where we all may be,
A Lady sits with the divinest eyes
Whose starry depths are still with Paradise.
She sits and looks upon this world of ours
And sees alike its sunshine and its showers.

“ And all her heart is overfull of love
For this poor world she knows the hardness of ;
And when we are sad, she sighs and longs to rest
Our aching heads on her divinest breast ;
But when we sin, she weeps we are beguiled
So far from her and from her little Child.

“ She weeps for us who sin—how can we dare
In such a mother's heart plant grief and care ?
She who is all we might be if we would,
Lovely and loving, gracious, great, and good ;
Only not happy—how can she be glad
While all men sin, and, sinning, are made sad ?

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

“ But saddest tears of all are those that rise,
Through the clear radiance of those crystal eyes,
When women sin—the women who might be
Mothers as pure or maids as clean as she ;
Women whose souls might be as chaste and clear
As the calm eyes of her, divine and dear.”

* * * * *

The worshippers had slowly passed away,
And one by one turned to their work or play ;
And one by one the dying tapers left
The church of all its golden glow bereft :
Only, before our Lady's altar, one
Love-lighted little twinkling taper shone.

Still with that peace which is the smile of God,
The priest along the empty chapel trod,
When—Is the chapel empty ? then what stirred
The silence with that half-articulate word ?
What breathed ? Who sobbed ? And what hand has he
passed

Thrust through the darkness, caught, and held him fast ?

“ Is it all true—about the Paradise,
And the dear lady with the crystal eyes,
And all her tears and loving—is it true ? ”
This is a woman speaks—a woman, too,
Whom shame and sin have crushed and pressed awry
From all her possible peace and purity.

“ It is not true—speak, is it true ? ” she cried.

“ True as your sorrow, child,” the priest replied.

BALLADS AND VERSES

“ But not for me—she does not weep for *me*,
Unworthy even of her memory ?
She weeps for those who do a little wrong,
Not me—who outraged her my whole life long.”

“ She weeps the most for those whose hearts most bleed.”
“ Then, O my heart, she weeps for us indeed.
So, I can not go back. It shall not be
That she shall ever weep again for me.
O save me, save me ! once that threshold crossed,
Her crystal eyes must weep me—doubly lost !”

Outside the church the night pressed closely round,
Dark as despair, as wide and as profound.
Within, the one small taper kept at bay
All evil dreams that through the darkness stray,
“ Here shall you stay—safe, and no longer sad,
Since o'er your soul God's angels have grown glad.

“ Before our Lady's altar kneel and pray,
Counsel of light will come with light of day,
And point us to some pathway, wherein you
May leave your past, and shape your life anew,
Fit for her eyes to see. Her mother-care
Shall keep your future undefiled and fair !”

Before our Lady's light all night she lay
Too passionately penitent to pray ;
Only within her heart the waves of woe
And joy went agonising to and fro.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

“Thou lovest me. I am safe beside thy feet.
Have pity on me—Mother-maiden sweet.”

* * * * *

The morning sunrise glorifies the face
Of Mary, Mother of ideal grace,
Touches the poor soiled face that has grown gray
Through rouge the tears have but half washed away ;
She does not weep now—does not breathe nor stir,
The Maiden Mother has had pity on her.

The Lily and the Cross

GIRDLED with elms, wherein the loud rooks build,
With dreamy hush of its remoteness filled,
Where every sound that breaks the slumb'rous air
Accentuates the peace that lingers there,
One of God's restful grave-set gardens lies,
Where His flowers sleep till He shall bid them rise.

The broken hearts that here have laid in faith
Their dearest dead, themselves have trusted Death,
Have gone themselves out of the light of day,
From scent of rose and fragrance of the may,
And in the spot left lonely for their sakes,
Have made that quietness life never makes.

But one new grave is there. And he who laid
Under its turf a dear and lovely maid,
Planted, before his bitterest tears were shed,
A lily over the belovèd head :
And ere the lily bloomed he lay beside
That Lily lost who should have been his bride.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The lily that he planted lived and throve
Over the grave of buried human love.
All through the winter's cruel hours and cold,
She lay safe curled beneath the sheltering mould,
Yet ever longed for winter to be done,
That she might break to bud and see the sun.

Long was the winter, and the tardy spring
She dreamed of so seemed to be tarrying
In the far world of the eternal flowers,
Reluctant to revive this world of ours
Where flowers must die, and spring herself must fade,
That summer's perfect tribute may be paid.

The birds who built high in the belfry tower.
Had heard the lily sigh for summer's hour,
And at the first low tremulous breath of spring,
A bird flew downwards to her, twittering,
"O Lily! Spring is coming: bud and break
Into your loveliest blossom, for her sake."

Shivering with joy, the waiting lily heard
That long-desired, all but despaired-of word.
She pushed aside the sheltering mould, and thrust
Her sharp leaves upwards through earth's yielding crust,
Did everything a lily could have done
To taste the hour when she should see the sun.

Then over all the earth was felt the dear
And gracious life of the re-risen year;
And vows of love were whispered where the wet
Dead leaves lay thick about the violet.

BALLADS AND VERSES

And all the meadow and the orchards gray,
Grew greener and more glorious every day.

The lily grew ; at last her drooping head
Hung over her forsaken winter bed ;
The sky was blue, the elms were green and fair,
And passionate life pulsated everywhere ;
“The sun, the sun,” she cried, “for whom I grow !
Oh, I shall die with longing for it so !”

She could not see the sun ! Upon her head
No golden heat and radiance were shed,
A shadow from the cross by which she grew
Fell on her and denied it to her view.
“What good at all is life,” she cried, “to me,
If I the sun I love may never see ?”

But the birds whispered, “Lily, be at rest !
The Master of the garden knoweth best ;
He gave the longing, and He is too good
To cheat the hope He planted in your blood :
Trust Him and wait—He will not mock desire
Which He Himself did in your soul inspire.”

The lily drooped and sorrowed—yet resigned,
Lived in the cross’s shadow, nor repined.
She knew the sun would some day shine for her,
And all her leaves to fuller being stir.
And if it never smiled on her ? “Instead
The Master of the garden will,” she said.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The days passed on, and every day the sun
Through higher heaven arose his course to run.
The lily woke from sleep on Easter day,
And her eyes opened to a tender ray
Shed through green leaves into the waiting cup
Which she so long had patiently held up.

And as completion seemed her life to crown,
All she had always longed for now her own—
She saw the Master of the garden pass
Among His flowers, among the graves and grass,
And at His voice she felt a stronger bliss
Than had thrilled through her at the sun's first kiss.

“ My lily now is strong enough to bear
The sunlight for which all her longings were.
The shadow of the cross was best before,
Which now, grown strong, she needs not any more.
Gaze on the sun, the shadow-time is past,
My patient lily, and be glad at last ! ”

Romney Marsh

“ At evening time there shall be light ”

THE day was wild with wind and rain,
One gray wrapped sky and sea and shore ;
It seemed our marsh would never again
Wear the rich robes that once it wore.
The scattered farms looked sad and chill,
Their sheltering trees writhed all awry,
And waves of mist broke on the hill
Where once the great sea thundered by.

Then God remembered this His land,
His little land that is our own ;
He caught the rain up in His hand,
He hid the winds behind His throne,
He soothed the fretful waves to rest,
He called the clouds to come away.
And, by blue pathways to the west,
They went, like children tired of play.

And then God bade our marsh put on
Its holy vestment of fine gold ;
From marge to marge the glory shone,
On lichened farm and fence and fold.
In the gold sky that walled the west,
In each transfigured stone and tree,
The glory of God was manifest—
Plain for a little child to see.

The Modern Judas

FOR what wilt thou sell thy Lord?

“For certain pieces of silver, since wealth buys the world’s good word.”

But the world’s word, how canst thou hear it, while thy brothers cry scorn on thy name?

And how shall thy bargain content thee, when thy brothers shall clothe thee with shame?

FOR what shall thy brother be sold?

“For the rosy garland of pleasure, and the coveted crown of gold.”

But thy soul will turn them to thorns, and to heaviness binding thy head,

While women are dying of shame, and children are crying for bread.

FOR what wilt thou sell thy soul?

“For the world.” And what shall it profit, when thou shalt have gained the whole?

What profit the things thou hast, if the thing thou art be so mean?

Wilt thou fill with the husks of having the void of the might-have-been?

BALLADS AND VERSES

“ But, when my soul shall be gone,
No more shall I fail to profit by all the deeds I have done !
And wealth and the world and pleasure shall sing sweet
songs in my ear
When the stupid soul is silenced which never would let me
hear.

“ And if a void there should be
I shall not feel it or know it ; it will be nothing to me !”
It will be nothing to thee, and thou shalt be nothing to men
But a ghost whose treasure is lost, and who shall not find it
again.

“ But I shall have pleasure and praise !”
Praise shall not pleasure thee then, nor pleasure laugh in
thy days :
For as colour is not, without light, so happiness is not,
without
Thy Brother—the Lord whom thou soldest—and the soul
that thou hast cast out !

Prayer under Gray Skies

O God, let there be rain !
Rain, till this sky of gray
That covers us every day
Be utterly wept away,
Let there be rain, we pray,
Till the sky be washed blue again—
Let there be rain !

O God, let there be rain,
For the sky hangs heavy with pain,
And we, who walk upon earth,
We find our days not of worth ;
None blesses the day of our birth,
We question of death's day in vain—
Let there be rain !

O God, let there be rain
Till the full-fed earth complain.
Yea, though it sweep away
The seeds sown yesterday
And beat down the blossoms of May
And ruin the border gay :
In storm let this gray noon wane,
Let there be rain !

BALLADS AND VERSES

O God, let there be rain
Till the rivers rise a-main !
 Though the waters go over us quite
 And cover us up from the light
 And whelm us away in the night
And the flowers of our life be slain,
 O God, let there be rain !

O God, let there be rain,
Out of the gray sky, rain !
 To wash the earth and to wash the sky,
 And the sick, sad souls of the folk who sigh
 In the gray of a sordid satiety.
 Open Thy flood-gates, O God most High,
And some day send us the sun again.
 O God, let there be rain !

A Great Industrial Centre

SQUALID street after squalid street,
Endless rows of them, each the same,
Black dust under your weary feet,
Dust upon every face you meet,
Dust in their hearts, too—or so it seems—
Dust in the place of dreams.

Spring in her beauty thrills and thrives,
Here men hardly have heard her name.
Work is the end and aim of their lives—
Work, work, work ! for their children and wives ;
Work for a life which, when it is won,
Is the saddest thing 'neath the sun !

Work—one dark and incessant round
In black, dull workshops out of the light ;
Work that others' ease may abound,
Work that delight for them may be found,
Work without hope, without pause, without peace,
That only in death can cease.

BALLADS AND VERSES

Brothers, who live glad lives in the sun,
What of these men, at work in the night?
God will ask you what you have done;
Their lives be required of you, every one,
You who were glad and who liked life well,
While they did your work, in hell!

London's Voices

Speak to two souls—who thus reply

I

IN all my work, in all children's play,
I hear the ceaseless hum of London near ;
It cries to me, I cannot choose but hear
Its never-ending wail, by night and day.
So many millions—is it vain to pray
That all may win such peace as I have here,
With books, and works, and little children dear?—
That flowers like mine may grow along their way?
Through all my happy life I hear the cry,
The exceeding bitter cry of human pain,
And shudder as the deathless wail sweeps by.
I can do nothing—even hope is vain
That the bright light of peace and purity
In those lost souls may ever shine again !

II

'Mid pine woods' whisper and the hum of bees
I heard a voice that was not bee nor wood :
" Here, in the city, Gold has trampled Good.
Come thou, do battle till this strife shall cease !"

BALLADS AND VERSES

I left the mill, the meadows and the trees,
And came to do the little best I could
For these, God's poor ; and, oh, my God, I would
I had a thousand lives to give for these !

What can one hand do 'gainst a world of wrong ?
Yet, when the voice said, " Come ! " how could I stay ?
The foe is mighty, and the battle long
(And love is sweet, and there are flowers in May),
And Gold seems weak, and Gold is very strong ;
But, while these fight, I dare not turn away.

These Little Ones

WHAT of the garden I gave?"

God said to me.

"Hast thou been diligent to foster and save

The life of flower and tree?

And have the roses thriven,

The lilies I have given,

The pretty, scented miracles that spring

And summer come to bring?"

"My garden is fair and dear,"

I said to God;

"From thorns and nettles I have kept it clear,

Green-trimmed its sod.

The rose is red and bright,

The lily a live delight.

I have not lost a flower of all the flowers

That blessed my hours."

"What of the child I gave?"

God said to me—

"The little living thing I died to save

And lent in trust to thee?"

BALLADS AND VERSES

How have the flowers grown
That in that soul were sown,
The lovely living miracles of youth
And hope and joy and truth?"

"The child's face is all white,"
I said to God ;
"It cries for cold and hunger in the night,
Its naked feet have trod
The pavement muddy and cold ;
It has no flowers to hold,
And in its heart the flowers you sowed are dead."
"Thou fool," God said.



Submission

I REACH my hands to thee,
 Stoop, take my hands in thine ;
Lead me where I would be,
 Mother divine !
I do not even know
The way I want to go,
 The way that leads to rest ;
But thou who knowest me,
Lead where I fain would be—
 Thou knowest best,

Toys, worthless yet desired,
 Lured me afar to roam ;
Mother, I am so tired—
 I am come home.
The love I once held cheap
Shews now so dear, so deep,
 So almost understood :
The night is dark and wild
I am thy little child,
 I *will* be good !

“Inasmuch as Ye Did It Not . . .”

If Jesus came to London,
Came to London to-day,
He would not go to the West End,
He would come down our way ;
He'd talk with the children dancing
To the organ out in the street,
And say He was their big Brother,
And give them something to eat.

He wouldn't go to the mansions
Where the charitable live,
He'd come to the tenement houses,
Where we ain't got nothing to give.
He'd come so kind and so homely,
And treat us to beer and bread,
And tell us how we ought to behave,
And we'd try to mind what He said.

In the warm bright West End churches
They sing and preach and pray ;
They call us “Belovèd brethren,”
But they do not act that way.

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

And when He come to the church door
He'd call out loud and free,
"You stop that preaching and praying
And show what you've done for Me."

Then they'd say, "O Lord, we have given
To the poor both blankets and tracts,
And we've tried to make them sober
And we've tried to teach them facts.
But they will sneak round to the drink shop
And pawn the blankets for beer,
And we find them very ungrateful—
But still we persevere."

Then He would say, "I told you,
The time I was here before,
That you were all of you brothers—
All you that I suffered for.
I won't go into your churches,
I'll stop in the sun outside.
You bring out the men—your brothers—
The men for whom I died!"

Out of our lousy lodgings,
From arches and doorways about—
They'd have to do as He told them,
They'd have to call us out—
Millions and millions and millions,
Thick, and crawling like flies,
We should creep out to the sunshine
And not be afraid of His eyes.

BALLADS AND VERSES

He'd see what God's image looks like
When men have dealt with the same—
Wrinkled with work that is never done,
Swollen and dirty with shame ;
He'd see on the children's foreheads
The branded gutter-sign,
That marks the girls to be harlots,
That dooms the boys to be swine.

Then He'd say, "What's the good of churches
When these have nowhere to sleep?
And how can I hear your praying
When they are cursing so deep?
I gave My blood and My body
That they might have bread and wine,
And you have taken your share and theirs
Of these good gifts of mine !"

Then some of the rich would be sorry,
And all would be very scared,
And they'd say, "But we never knew, Lord !"
And He'd say, "You never cared !"
And some would be sick and shameful
Because they'd know that they knew,
And the best would say, "We were wrong, Lord.
Now tell us what to do !"

I think he'd be sitting, likely,
For some one 'ud bring Him a chair,
With a common kid cuddled up on His knee
And the common sun on His hair ;

OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

And they'd be standing before Him,
And He'd say, " You know that you knew.
Why haven't you worked for your brothers
The same as I worked for you ?

" For since you're all of you brothers,
It's clear as God's blessed sun,
That each must work for the others—
Not thousands work for one.
And the ones that have lived bone-idle,
If they want Me to hear them pray,
Let them go and work for their livings—
The only honest way !

" I've got nothing new to tell you.
You know what I always said—
But you've built their bones into churches
And stolen their wine and bread ;
You, with My name on your foreheads,
Liar, and traitor, and knave,
You have lived by the death of your brothers—
These whom I died to save !"

I wish He would come and say it ;
Perhaps they'd believe it then,
And work like men for their livings,
And let us work like men.
Brothers ? They don't believe it,
The lie on their lips is red. . . .
They'll never believe till He comes again,
Or till we rise from the dead !

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